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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 004510

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DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA PRIME MINISTER -- Yusuf Changes His Mind

NAIROBI 00004510 001.3 OF 002

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REF: A) Nairobi 4426

B) Yates-Frazer Telecons 11/17 and 19

Classified by Ambassador Michael E. Ranneberger for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Nur Hassan Hussein "Adde" will likely be announced as the new Prime Minister of the Somalia Transitional Federal Government (TFG) November 20 rather than Sheikh Hassan Ali Nur who had been presented to us as the presumptive candidate just one week ago. We were told that Nur's candidacy was scratched when it was learned that he had been a member of the Islamic political movement, al-Islah. The new choice, Nur Hussein, is a 69-year old retired police colonel and former Attorney General who has been Secretary-General of the Somali Red Crescent Society since 1991, with

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a favorable reputation. Yusuf selected him after several days of consultations with clan elders, politicians and civil society representatives. The consultations included specifically a meeting with Hawiye/Abgaal leaders including Parliamentarians who promoted Nur Hussein for the post. The Ambassador and Special Envoy met with Nur Hussein November 19 and found him to be thoughtful, serious about the potential appointment, and anxious for close collaboration with the USG. His previous experience with the police, as Attorney General and his association with the international donor community are considered positive qualities. END SUMMARY

2.(C) When President Yusuf departed Nairobi for Baidoa November 13, after presenting Sheikh Hassan Ali Nur to us as his candidate for PM, he said he would continue his consultations among Somali factions to confirm Sheikh Nur's wider acceptability and to inform Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles and Saudi Arabian authorities of his choice. After his meetings with three (of the 4.5) clans, we begin to receive indications over the weekend that Nur's nomination was in trouble. The al-Islah membership (which could not have been a surprise) emerged as an issue, perhaps raised by the Ethiopians. (Comment: We considered al-Islah to be a generally non-violent movement emphasizing the reformation and revival of Islam in order to meet the challenges of the modern world and that Nur's affiliation actually might be a positive factor in reaching out to non-violent Islamists in the opposition. End Comment). There were also indications that the Hawiye/Abgaal did not consider Sheikh Hassan Ali Nur as their

candidate and let Yusuf know he was unacceptable. Yusuf asked them to give him an alternative and laid out the criteria. A forty-four member selection committee, apparently organized and led by Mogadishu Mayor Mohammed Dheere, considered three candidates and was near unanimous in endorsing Nur Hussein.

3.(S/NF) Our contacts in the presidency informed us over the weekend that the new short list included three names: Nur Hassan Hussein "Adde"; Minister of Trade Abdullahi Afrah; and, Dubai-based businessman Abdirizak Issak Ido, the President of NationLink Telcom. All are Hawiye/Abgaals. We knew Nur Hassan only by reputation (generally good) and that he had been also recommended by former PM Gedi. We did not consider Minister of Trade Afrah to have the necessary qualities. Abdirizak Ido was well and favorably known to us as a highly successful Dubai-based businessman. Special Envoy Yates spoke several times with President Yusuf about Ido but Yusuf was from the start leery of Ido's ties with Islamists. He asked us to meet with Nur Hussein, which the Ambassador and Special Envoy did November 19.

14. (C) With the example of the now defunct candidacy of Sheik Hassan Ali Nur fresh in mind, the Ambassador began by determining that Nur Hussein had no ties with al-Islah and by exploring whether the rejection of Ali Mahdi's candidate was going to rebound negatively with the Abgaal. He then warned that this may be last chance for the TFG. Not only was it important to have an effective PM who could work well with the President, the new cabinet must have a critical mass of competent ministers, probably also coming from outside the Parliament pool. He emphasized the need for consensus building, restoration of security and a regime of law and order that will permit the humanitarian assistance to get delivered. Nur's responses were generally good with, however, perhaps a few too many references to 1991. He explicitly and strongly reaffirmed commitment to seeing the Transitional Federal Charter implemented in a manner to achieve a successful transition within the prescribed time.

15. (C) Hussein expressed appreciation for the role Ethiopia is playing in Somalia while at the same time noting that the Ethiopians could help establish order, but they cannot build the institutions to maintain it. Security, he said, would only be possible with reconciliation. He talked about the importance of bringing back talent from the diaspora and overcoming the conditions among disadvantaged youth which make them an easy recruiting ground for Shabaab. He also insisted on the necessity of reaching out to try to attract moderate elements from the Asmara group as part of the overall reconciliation process.

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16. (S/NF) Following the interview the Special Envoy was in frequent contact with the President's office in Baidoa, including three separate November 19 conversations with Yusuf. He relayed that we had run our own preliminary background checks on Nur Hussein and Abdirizak Ido as had been requested and we had come up with nothing negative. When asked for an appreciation of the two candidates' pluses and minuses, the Special Envoy gave his frank appraisal, noting as strengths Nur Hussein's experience with the police and that his association with the Somali Red Crescent Society had taken him into Somalia frequently over the years. (Note: Nur Hassan Hussein has been resident in Nairobi since becoming head of the Somalia Red Crescent spending, he told us, about 20 percent of his time in London where his family resides. End Note). The Special Envoy also noted that being PM was such an overwhelming challenge at this particular time that perhaps a younger man with energy and talent might be a better choice. He gave a strong push for Ido, including his own personal knowledge of Ido from a meeting in Dubai as well as A/S Frazer's general appreciation for talented, successful business managers.

¶7. (S/NF) First Yusuf's staff, then the President himself, pushed back firmly on Ido's links to Islamists. Yusuf said Ido had an Eritrean mother; that he was "100 percent sure" he was a member of al-Islah who never accepted democracy; that although he is "young and strong," Ido has no government experience. It was also alleged that figures connected with the CIC, as well as former Speaker Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden, had a financial stake in NationLink. And perhaps the most telling point, he said, "the Ethiopians will refuse" his appointment. As for Nur Hussein, Yusuf said they could work well together since they spoke the same language coming from their police/military backgrounds. Yusuf also noted Hussein's good rapport with the international donor community, said that he was committed to the fight against terrorism and had the support of his sub clan and many Hawiye. Yusuf's staff added that Hussein's age was not seen as a detriment but as a positive in a Somali society that respected age.

¶8. (C) We heard mid-day Tuesday that Nur Hassan Hussein has departed Nairobi for Baidoa for his final interview with President Yusuf. If there are no hitches, he could be announced as Prime Minister-designate as early as today (Tuesday). The Parliament would begin deliberations on his confirmation.

¶9. (S) COMMENT: While Nur Hassan Hussein was not our first choice to form a new government, he has several positive attributes already noted. If a government headed by him (or anyone else for that matter) is to succeed, it will have to include some other talented individuals. We have made that point clear to Yusuf and to each of the candidates for PM whom we have met. If Nur Hassan Hussein's appointment is announced and confirmed we will work closely with UNSRSG Ould-Abdallah and other major players in the international community to provide advice and support to do what we can to make this chance, perhaps the last one for the TFG, a success.
RANNEBERGER